

Transcript
Employee Interviews
June 26, 2012

Event: Black Hills National Forest Employee talk about their jobs, their proudest moments and also why they love working on the Black Hills National Forest.

Gwen Lipp, Fire Management Officer, Hell Canyon District Office

The motto of the US Forest Service is “caring for the land and serving the people,” and I think here on the Black Hills we do an exceptional job of that. We truly are multiple use and we do above and beyond when it comes to serving our community. We really are part of the community and we take pride in that. I’m really proud to be part of that organization. I think one of the most exciting things about my position is that you never know what the day will bring. There’s always so much unknowns when it comes to fire, prescribed fire, and so it’s always unpredictable and I really enjoy that unpredictability about my position. I do work with some of the best in the business, and they are very professional and efficient at what they do, and I’m very proud of that. I’m proud to work on the Black Hills, and being the multiple use area that we are, and being able to serve the public the best that we do.

Dave Mertz, Natural Resource Staff, Supervisor’s Office

What I knew about the Black Hills is that there’s a lot going on here. It was a forest that’s still a very productive forest, you know a big timber program, a big fire program, just lots of things going on in the Black Hills and that’s one of the things that attracted me to the forest. My job is very challenging. I’ve not been bored at all since I got here. I’ve been very busy. I get to work on some very interesting things that, in my mind, make a difference, you know that are important and you can really make a difference to the Black Hills and the people that live here. The best part of my job is really probably working with the staff that works for me. I’m very proud of them. We’re working on some difficult issues, in particular the Mountain Pine Beetle issue that’s going on in the Black Hills. My staff, they are a dedicated, experienced group of professionals who are really doing their best to try and solve all the issues that we’re dealing with.

Kelly Owens, Botanist, Mystic Ranger District

Well I do a variety of things, both inside and outside. The best part of my job is that I actually get paid to go hang out in the woods. I go out and I survey and I make GIS layers, and then when there’s a management activity that’s going to take place then I would say that there’s these plants in this area and that we should protect them and not skid through them or anything like that. I get to work with some really great people and I’m proud of the people that I work with. You know we have a lot of things going on, but people always have the time to help other people out and that’s really great.

Andy Solvie, Dispatcher, Great Plains Dispatch

I’m an IA dispatcher and that’s my main job. We do everything from issuing burn permits in the winter time to dispatching people to fires during the summer, and fielding call about anything and everything, talking to the media and reading fire weather and quite a bit of different stuff. Just that we can help others, just helping people out in the field, making their jobs easier. Getting them to the fires as quickly as possible. Helping the public with any questions they have, getting burn permits and just helping others. I think just the way our team is ... we’re interagency dispatch, so

the way our team works together through the good times and the bad times, and then even the way our forest works together and works with the other agencies also.

Stacy Hazen, Forester, Timber, Northern Hills

Well my job is really awesome. I enjoy going out in the wood every day looking at timber. That's what I was educated in and that's what I like to do. I'm also part of an awesome group of people who work on timber management so there will be a forest for future generations. The Black Hills is unique. It has geology, it has recreation, it has timber management—just about everything you would, I would be looking for as a forester, and I really enjoy living and working here in the Black Hills.

Andrew Hostad, Assistant Fire Prevention Captain, Northern Hills

Any given day I can find myself battling a wildfire, lighting prescribed burns, I could, ah the next day I could be in the classroom with a bunch of kindergarteners all the way up to high school just educating them about why forests are important, forest succession, and just preventing, things that they can do to prevent wildfires.

Amy Ham, Fire Planner, Supervisors Office

One of the best things I think about my job is the ability to be able to travel all over the United States fighting fires and prescribed fires and just learning the different fire behaviors and fuel models and being able to put that into perspective back on my own forest.

Eric Nelson, Law Enforcement Officer, Hell Canyon

I feel like I'm making a difference every day by being out there and trying to address what seems to be the priorities at the time and trying to, you know having that flexibility to go out and focus on what the other priorities on the forest whether they're issues that I have to be dealing with. I think one of the best parts of the last year is the crew I have to work with here. Outstanding, a team of law-enforcement officer not only here in the Black Hills but also in the northern zone, and I think for me that's one of the best parts, so that's been the best moment of this last year for me is to work with the caliber of people that I've got to work with.

Angie Hinker, Assistant Center Manager, Great Plains Dispatch

One of my favorite parts of the job is being able to help people. We do that a lot of ways, helping the public, helping the citizens, you know being the safety net for the folks in the field. If something should go wrong then we're there to help. One of my most proudest moments this past year was being able to help design our new dispatch center and see that come to fruition. One of the things that I really enjoy is the interagency cooperation and that's one of my favorite things working in the Black Hills National Forest, you don't really just work for the Black Hills, you work for all the federal partners in the states as well.

Corey Lewis, Assistant Helitack Manager, Supervisors Office

Well, I worked my way, worked my way up. I was an assistant engine captain as well, and was able to get into the job in Helitack, you know working with seasonals in those jobs too. Yeah that's probably one of my proudest moments is working with those seasonals and watching 'em grown up.

Jeramy Dalman, Assistant Fire Management Officer, Mystic

I guess what stands out most is the abundance of recreational activities. There's something here for everybody. Well, actually, a couple of years ago my crew and myself assisted in kind of a high angle

rescue on Pikes Peak down in Colorado. A young man drove his car off the top of Pikes Peak down into a ravine and we just happened to be there. We used some of our fire equipment to assist us down to the mans' location and waited for the search and rescue teams to show up and assisted getting him up to the top.

Nicole Gregory, Engine Captain, Hell Canyon

We start out our mornings with safety briefings where we discuss the plans for the day and various safety topics and then from there we go out and do our project, usually fuels treatment projects to go ahead of fires and put in fuel breaks, so that if a fire would occur we have a chance to stop it. I really do enjoy working for the forest service. It's an excellent job. It provides very great learning opportunities and training.

Peter Howard, Forester/Timber, Northern Hills

I think the thing I'm proudest of working with the Black Hills is that here we have a very successful partnership with the local logging industry, and in that partnership we're able to accomplish a lot of vegetation management and keep the forest as healthy, and in the best condition that we can.

Nick Pieper, Assistant Captain, Hell Canyon

What I like most about being assistant captain is like I said working with the young people, just the day-to-day operations, travelling around the country, going to fires. This year I'm really proud of our seasonals, fire staff overall, just great leadership.

Josh Peck, Forester/Timber, Northern Hills

I like just being in the woods and the opportunity to work with skilled and motivated employees. This past year we had a lot of turnover on my district, and I ended up being the employee that had been there the longest and I had really no idea what I was doing. I was learning as I was going and we had all new people and we were still able to accomplish everything that we had to accomplish and I thought that was a pretty amazing thing. I like how the Black Hills are managed. I came from a forest where there wasn't a lot of things going on and it's nice to have work to do all the time, and see things going on all the time, and see people involved in their jobs.

Patric Morton, Geologist, Northern Hills

Well I'm really proud, this summer I finished my SCEP appointment. SCEP stands for Student Career Experience Program. That's a program that the forest service has that allows students to work into sort of full time permanent positions and I completed that this summer when I completed my degree and I was able to move into a permanent position which I'm really proud of. As a geologist I really appreciate the geologic history of the area. I think that's really interesting and I encourage people to learn more about the geology of the Black Hills.

Rob Schilling, Assistant Engine Captain, Hell Canyon

Well, I'm an assistant engine captain so my job is pretty much, in the absence of my supervisor, to run a wild land fire engine and to respond to wild land fire emergencies. It's a great gig. It's actually my favorite thing about working for the forest service. The winter's great. I love burning piles and stuff, but my favorite thing is when Great Plains calls and they say "Hey, your engine's the one going to this fire." That's the biggest rush. Probably my most proud accomplishment last summer would be watching the seasonals develop. I'm relatively new to the Black Hills. I've only been in my position for about 13 months, and so to take a bunch of people I've never met, respond to an emergency, and have them function as a whole unit, that was pretty cool.

Andy Barth, North Zone Electronics Tech, Service Zone 6 and 7

It's an adventure. I'm surrounded by an incredible team of people. I've been doing this for 20 years and I have found that every day is a learning experience. I'm surrounded by some of the best and most knowledgeable technicians in the country. I came a year ago and I didn't know anybody and this has become an incredible family. Everywhere from Newcastle down to Hot Springs and all the way up to you know the Northern Hills and across to the Bridger Teton, nothing but good people to work with and good friendships.